



# NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

**TODD P. GRAVES**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

OPERATION ICE PALACE  
**THREE CO-DEFENDANTS SENTENCED**  
**IN METH-RELATED CONSPIRACY**

**SPRINGFIELD, Mo.** – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that three co-defendants have been sentenced in federal court for their roles in a conspiracy to distribute ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine.

These sentencings are the result of Operation Ice Palace, a long-term investigation into the illegal sale of large quantities of over-the-counter cold medications to methamphetamine manufacturers in southwest Missouri. Operation Ice Palace resulted in a series of indictments by a federal grand jury against 53 defendants.

**Benjamin Paine**, 28, of Purdy, Mo., and **Tracy J. VanBibber**, 39, of Camdenton, Mo., were sentenced in separate appearances this morning before U.S. District Judge Ortrie D. Smith. **Paine** was sentenced to seven years and three months in federal prison without parole. **VanBibber** was sentenced to three years and one month in federal prison without parole.

On April 18, 2005, **Paine** pleaded guilty to his role in the conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine.

On April 15, 2005, **VanBibber** pleaded guilty to distributing pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **VanBibber** was an employee of County Corner Convenience Store in Sunrise Beach, Mo., in August 2002, when she sold a total of 360 pseudoephedrine pills to an undercover officer with the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

**Russell Brown**, 43, of Seligman, Mo., was sentenced on Wednesday to one year in federal prison without parole. **Brown** was the manager of the Pit Stop in Seligman, which is owned by co-defendant **Norman R. Weaver**, 44, of Seligman.

On May 16, 2005, **Brown** pleaded guilty to his role in the conspiracy. **Brown** admitted that he had an agreement with others to obtain pseudoephedrine in order to provide it to individuals to use to manufacture methamphetamine. On Sept. 17, 2002, **Brown** was in possession of 720 pills of 30-milligram dosage pseudoephedrine to distribute to another person in order to manufacture methamphetamine.

Four co-defendants have been sentenced among 12 who have pleaded guilty to charges contained in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Springfield on March 31, 2004, and later replaced by superseding indictments. Among those co-defendants:

\* **Weaver** pleaded guilty on May 6, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy. **Weaver** is the owner of Norm's Grocery Store and the Pit Stop in Seligman. **Weaver** admitted that he had an agreement with co-defendants **Gabriel Delossantos**, 29, of Rogers, Ark., and **Paine** to distribute pseudoephedrine in order to have the pseudoephedrine be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Weaver** admitted that he sold 2,568 pills of 30-milligram dosage pseudoephedrine to **Delossantos** and **Paine** on Oct. 16, 2002, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine.

\* **Delossantos** pleaded guilty on April 14, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy.

\* **Michael G. Williams**, 37, of Springfield, pleaded guilty on May 6, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy. **Williams** was a salesman for Handi-Rak, a convenience store supply company located in Springfield. From January 2001 to July 2002, **Williams** supplied The Castle – a Taney County, Mo., head shop – with large amounts of pseudoephedrine. On April 11, 2002, **Williams** delivered 96 boxes of cold medications containing pseudoephedrine to The Castle, for which Handi-Rak was paid \$249. During the time **Williams** was in the store, Graves said, he talked to the store clerks about obtaining even more pseudoephedrine, in higher milligram dosages, for The Castle. The most readily provable amount that **Williams** was responsible for distributing is 40 to 70 grams of pseudoephedrine.

\* **Troy K. Kelly**, 33, of Gerard, Kan., pleaded guilty on April 22, 2005. **Kelly** was a sales agent for Handi-Rak.

\* **Gerri Deering**, 47, of Shell Knob, Mo., pleaded guilty on April 18, 2005, to her role in the conspiracy. **Deering** admitted that, while employed at Rapid Roberts in Shell Knob, Mo., she sold a total of 936 pseudoephedrine pills of 30- and 60-milligram dosage to an undercover officer with the Missouri State Highway patrol in July and August of 2002.

\* **William Blair**, 72, of Bradleyville, Mo., pleaded guilty on May 13, 2005, to distributing pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Blair** is the owner of Billy Jack's Package Store in Bradleyville.

\* **Deborah Parker**, 46, address unknown, and **Margaret Vinson**, 35, of Garfield, Kan., each pleaded guilty on May 13, 2005, to distributing pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Parker** and **Vinson** were employees at the Missouri

Package Store in Seligman, which had reportedly sold large amounts of pseudoephedrine to persons who were using it to manufacture methamphetamine. Based on those reports, Graves said, undercover law enforcement officers visited the store on Aug. 14, 2002. During that visit, **Parker** and **Vinson** offered to sell the entire inventory of pseudoephedrine products contained in the store. **Parker** and **Vinson** then sold the officers 780 pseudoephedrine tablets of various dosages, for which the officers paid \$157.

\* **Charles Laffoon**, 64, of Harrison, Ark., was sentenced on May 4, 2005, to three years of probation. On June 4, 2004, **Laffoon** pleaded guilty to his role in the conspiracy to distribute pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Laffoon** was a sales agent for Handi-Rak, a convenience store supply company from January 2001 until November 2003.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Ice Palace was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, COMET (the Combined Ozarks Multi-jurisdictional Enforcement Team), the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Greene County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Lawrence County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Ozark County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Arkansas State Police, and the Springfield, Mo., Police Department.

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This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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